

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

120714Z May 05

ACTION EAP-00

INFO	LOG-00	AID-00	AMAD-00	CIAE-00	INL-00	DODE-00	PERC-00
	EB-00	OIGO-00	H-00	TEDE-00	INR-00	IO-00	L-00
	NRC-00	NSAE-00	NSCE-00	OES-00	OIC-00	PA-00	PRS-00
	P-00	FMPC-00	SP-00	SS-00	STR-00	TRSE-00	PRM-00
	DRL-00	G-00	NFAT-00	SAS-00	SWCI-00	/000W	
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FM AMEMBASSY HANOI  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7598  
INFO AMEMBASSY BEIJING  
AMEMBASSY PHNOM PENH  
AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE

C O N F I D E N T I A L HANOI 001105

SIPDIS

STATE FOR BCLTV AND DRL/IRF

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/12/2015

TAGS: [KIRF](#) [PHUM VM](#) [ETMIN](#) [HUMANR](#) [RELFREE](#)

SUBJECT: PERSPECTIVES ON RELIGION IN THE NW HIGHLANDS

REF: A. HANOI 956

- [1](#)B. HANOI 580
- [1](#)C. HANOI 353
- [1](#)D. HANOI 1051

Classified By: PolCouns Marc E. Knapper for reason 1.4 (d)

[1](#)1. (SBU) Summary: Protestantism continues to grow rapidly in Vietnam's Northwest Highlands. Practitioners report few difficulties in Ha Giang and Lai Chau Provinces, but the situation in Dien Bien Province is more difficult. The introduction of Vietnam's new legal framework governing religion has had mixed results. Some practitioners have been able to practice more openly, while others have seen no change. Reports of occasional attempts at forced renunciations of faith continue. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (C) On May 11, Poloff met with two ethnic Hmong Protestants from Vietnam's Northwest Highlands who had come to Hanoi to participate in a spiritual retreat led by house church pastor Doan Trung Tin (protect). Both of the Hmong identified themselves as regional "church planters" in charge of developing and overseeing part of a network of unofficial pastors and house churches in the Northwest Highlands.

[1](#)3. (C) Sung Chan Tan (protect) oversees a network of 55 house churches in Ha Giang Province from his home in Hoang Su Phi District. Tan has six other church planters working under him, and a total of 3,400 faithful attending his churches. Tan converted to Christianity in 1990 after discussing the religion with another Hmong believer. Subsequently, he studied the Bible "by listening to the radio." (Note: Presumably he did this by listening to the Hmong language religious broadcasts of the Far Eastern Broadcasting Corporation based in the Philippines. End Note.) In 2001, Tan traveled to Ho Chi Minh City to receive training on becoming a church planter from Pastor Tin.

[1](#)4. (C) Tan described Protestantism as growing quickly in Ha Giang. For example, in 2001 there were only ten churches in Hoang Su Phi District, but today there are 21. He meets openly with local authorities to inform them about the operations of his house churches, and they generally do not cause him any problems. The exception is a single church in Gap Trung Village, where border guards stationed in the village disrupted services and caused four local church leaders to be arrested. These four were released during Vietnam's special prisoner amnesty on April 30 (Ref A. Note: The Mission raised these four cases several times with the GVN. End Note.) After their return to Gap Trung Village, the border guards called the four into their station and unsuccessfully attempted to make them sign documents renouncing their faith.

[1](#)5. (C) Tan indicated that he has received copies from the Protestant church in Hanoi of the Implementing Decree for Vietnam's Ordinance on Religion and of the Prime Minister's Instruction on Protestantism (Refs. B and C). The local police in Ha Giang have not yet received copies of these documents, however, and in one instance local police came to his house church to read the versions he possessed. Nonetheless, Tan said that, in his view, the situation for the believers in his house churches has improved since the legal changes were released. For example, the churches meet openly twice a week.

16. (C) Mua Cho Thu (protect) serves as the leader for seven other church planters, 57 churches and 6,500 believers in Lai Chau and Dien Bien Provinces. Thu converted to Christianity in 1992 after listening to radio broadcasts, and went on his own initiative to the Protestant Church in Hanoi, where he was given some Christian literature to read. He later met with a church planter active in the Northwest Highlands, and in 1998 went to Vientiane to study the Bible with a Hmong pastor. Thu said his followers in Lai Chau Province have few difficulties with authorities, but the situation is very different in Dien Bien.

17. (C) Thu cited four house churches in Dien Bien Dong District of Dien Bien Province as being unable to gather due to pressure by authorities. Thu also reported that police in Cha Cang Commune, Muong Lay District have attempted to force Protestants to sign renunciations of faith and rebuild their ancestral altars, and threatened to "eradicate Christianity" in the commune by the end of April. As with Tan, Thu has received copies of Vietnam's new Ordinance, Decree and Prime Minister's Instruction from the Protestant Church in Hanoi, and not from provincial authorities. He said he saw no difference in the way followers were being treated since the introduction of the legal changes.

18. (C) Comment: News of continued forced renunciations is disappointing, but we came away from the conversations encouraged. Only one of the 55 house churches in Tan's Ha Giang network suffering problems would be average for anywhere in Vietnam, and that Thu could point to no difficulties in Lai Chau was similarly welcome. This, combined with the nascent changes in official attitudes we saw in Lao Cai Province during the Ambassador's recent visit (Ref. D), suggests that Hanoi's more progressive policies may be making inroads in the Northwest Highlands. Still, the GVN has cautioned us that this is a "sensitive area" and change will come slowly. The hardline attitudes and abuses in Dien Bien underscore this. End Comment.  
Marine

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